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AUTHOR Broadbent, William A.
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ABSTRACT

A state-wide survey of the personnel directors at 31 randomly selected firms with 180 employees or more was conducted to determine employer attitudes toward those employees who had graduated from high school or community college vocational education programs. The survey, administered during personal interviews, asked participants to: (1) indicate the area of training most heavily represented by employees who had experienced vocational education; (2) compare those employees who had not undergone training with those who had; and (3) evaluate, on a five-point Likert scale, vocationally trained employees against 11 criteria commonly used in employee evaluations. Survey results indicated that service firms were the most heavily represented group in the sample, and that business education was the most common training area among employees who had undergone high school or community college vocational education. The majority of respondents felt that vocational education students were better prepared for employment than those students with no such training; none indicated that vocational students were less prepared. The overall rating for high school graduates on the five-point scale was 3.4, and community college graduates received a 3.9. Both groups were rated highly on mechanical skills, work attitudes, and motivation. Data tables and selected respondent comments are provided in the study report. (JP)

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SECOND ANNUAL EMPLOYER SATISFACTION SURVEY

WILLIAM A. BROADBENT

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OFFICE OF THE STATE DIRECTOR FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII
BACHMAN HALL 101, 2444 DOLE STREET
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96822

JC 800 306

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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SECOND ANNUAL
EMPLOYER SATISFACTION SURVEY

William A. Broadbent

Introduction

One of the two most important criteria employed to assess the effectiveness of vocational education involves employer satisfaction.* State Board evaluators are required by federal legislation to determine if those employers who hire graduates of publically supported vocational education programs feel that the performance of these former students is superior to that of persons who have not enrolled in such training programs.

Last year the State Board for Vocational Education conducted its first study to ascertain employer satisfaction. That study involved three populations. These were:

1. Large businesses
2. Small and medium size businesses, and
3. Training coordinators of apprenticeship programs.

All of these surveys produced useful information. However, the canvass of large businesses provided the most meaningful data. It was also discovered in the course of the study that large firms were more likely to hire people in job entry level positions involving some sort of prior vocational training than were small businesses. As a consequence, it was decided to focus this year's efforts on firms that had an average monthly payroll of over 180 employees. In the previous year the cut-off had been 250 employees.

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* The other involves placement in a field related to training.

Since no small business survey was planned or implemented this year, it was felt that an increase in the potential sample would be wise. Considerations of time and money precluded a planned survey of management representatives on joint apprenticeship committees. Perhaps this project can be undertaken next year.

The focus of this years study, as of the surveys undertaken last year, was on "program." No reference to the on-the-job performance of a specific individual was made for ethical and methodological reasons. The reader is perhaps familiar with the fact that the agency which administers the Vocational Education Data System (VEDS) also requires an employer satisfaction survey. In the methodology prescribed, the employer or supervisor is asked to evaluate an employee's prior training in terms of his or her present on-the-job performance.

It seems unfair to ask a former student, just because he or she was once enrolled in a vocational education program, to submit to an evaluation by his or her supervisor when no personal benefit can accrue to that individual.

The assumption that it is possible to isolate "program" as a variable in the evaluation of a person's job performance is also specious. It seems unlikely that "program" would emerge as the most significant variable if multiple regression were employed for the purpose of inferential analyses.

The prescribed VEDS design also appears very vulnerable to inadvertent violations of the Federal Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA). A casually misplaced evaluation form, which was prepared for the Department of Education or University of Hawaii, might be the cause of a good deal of anguish for a former student.

Approximately one-fourth of the largest firms, in terms of employees, were selected for study. The sample was drawn at random from the Department of Labor's "Statewide Average Annual Workers Report." Firms appearing in the

sample, which were contacted during last year's study, were deleted and a substitution drawn as necessary. As the result of the efforts of the last two years, approximately one-third of the large private employers in the state have been contacted for interview.**

The interview schedule is reproduced in attachment "A". Many of the items are of the "forced focus" variety. However, others permit an extended response.

Findings

Thirty-one firms were selected for inclusion in the survey. The personnel directors of three of the firms declined not to be interviewed. One claimed that his firm hired only unskilled people at the job entry level, two others reported that they had not hired people with vocational training in the last five years. The total number of people employed by the firms studied was approximately 19,422 (refer to Table 1). The average number of employees was 694. The personnel directors who were interviewed proved most helpful and volunteered a good deal of supplemental information. In light of the previous years experience, one hour was allowed for the interview. This usually proved sufficient but an occasional interview lasted much longer.

Service firms were the most heavily represented group in this particular sample. This is consistent with the overall state pattern. Forty-six percent of the firms were in this group (refer to Table 2).

Not surprisingly, all firms had offices or operating units in Honolulu (refer to Table 2). Fourteen had operations in the county of Hawaii, eleven in Kauai, and eighteen in Maui.

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* This is if you use the 180 employee criterion. If the 250 criterion is employed, the percentage is higher.

TABLE 1

AVERAGE MONTHLY EMPLOYMENT OF FIRMS CONTACTED

FOR THE 1979 LARGE FIRM SURVEY

Firm	$\bar{X}$= 694	Average Monthly Payroll
Firm 1		910
Firm 2		1,270
Firm 3		1,930
Firm 4		535
Firm 5		578
Firm 6		521
Firm 7		283
Firm 8		290
Firm 9		256
Firm 10		272
Firm 11		210
Firm 12		414
Firm 13		197
Firm 14		195
Firm 15		184
Firm 16		191
Firm 17		1,392
Firm 18		1,244
Firm 19		2,599
Firm 20		1,244
Eirm 21		193
Firm 22		366
Firm 23		489
Firm 24		204
Firm 25		450
Firm 26		230
Firm 27		1,099
Firm 28		1,676
	TOTAL	19,422

TABLE 2

TYPE OF FIRM

Category	N	%
Agriculture,Fisheries	2	7.1
Construction	2	7.1
Manufacturing	2	7.1
Transportation	3	10.7
Wholesale Trade	1	3.6
Retail Trade	4	14.3
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	1	3.6
Service	13	46.5
Other	0	0.0
TOTAL	28	100.0

TABLE 3

COUNTIES OF HAWAII

WHERE FIRMS OPERATE

County	f
Honolulu	28
Hawaii	14
Kauai	11
Maui	18

TABLE 4

FIRMS WITH EMPLOYEES WHO TOOK

VOCATIONAL COURSES IN HIGH SCHOOL

Response	N	%
Yes	23	82.1
No	5	17.9
Don't Know	0	0.0
TOTAL	28	100.0

The personnel directors of all but five firms that were interviewed reported that they had some employees that had taken vocational education courses in high school (refer to Table 4).

The area of training most heavily represented among the vocationally trained graduates employed directly out of high school was "business" (refer to Table 5). Forty-six percent reported this as the area most heavily represented. "Food service" was mentioned by 10.7% of the firms. The employer was then asked to focus his attention on the performance of persons hired in the skill area reported as being most heavily represented in his firm, for the remainder of the "high school hire" questions.

One of the most critical items on the interview schedule involved a comparison of new employees with vocational education backgrounds in high school with those without such an experience. Of the total sample, 71.4% asserted that those taking occupational training in high school were "better prepared" for the world of work than those without such training (refer to Table 6). When the "non-applicable" responses were factored out, the percentage of personnel directors reporting vocational training backgrounds among their high school applicants soared to 83.3%. No respondent felt that high school graduates with vocational training were less prepared for the world of work.

This criterion is specified as being significant in Section 104.402(c)(4) of the federal regulations. The very positive pattern of response is, as a consequence, all the more satisfying.

Employers were asked to evaluate their new hires who had vocational education in high school against eleven criteria which are frequently used in employment evaluations. A five point Likert scale was used.

TABLE 5

PROGRAM AREA MOST HEAVILY REPRESENTED
IN PRIOR TRAINING OF NEW EMPLOYEES

Program	N	%
Agriculture	1	3.6
Business	13	46.5
Construction	1	3.6
Electrical/Electronic	0	0.0
Food Service	3	10.7
Health	1	3.6
Technical/Graphic	0	0.0
Mechanical	2	7.1
Personal/Public Service	0	0.0
Other	2	7.1
Non-Applicable	5	17.8
No Major Area	0	0.0
TOTAL	28	100.0

TABLE 6

COMPARISON OF NEW EMPLOYEES WITH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION BACKGROUNDS IN HIGH SCHOOL WITH THOSE WITHOUT

Assessment of Voc. Ed. Trained Employees	N	%
No basis for comparison	0	0.0
Voc. ed. students better prepared	20	71.4
Voc. ed. students no better prepared	4	14.3
Voc. ed. students less prepared	0	0.0
Non-applicable	4	14.3
No opinion	0	0.0
TOTAL	28	100.0

Almost 43% gave their successful high school hires with vocational education backgrounds a high rating of 4 in the area of "technical knowledge." This criterion also generated a high average rating of 3.4 (refer to Table 7). "Work attitude" also produced a modal rating of 4. Those expressing an opinion on "work quality" gave the employees in question either a 3 or 4 rating. "Written communication skills" received the lowest ratings. The mode was 2 and the mean only 2.4. This reflects a similar pattern of response as last year. Employers continue to be concerned about poor writing skills among their new hires.

New employees with a high school vocational background were more favorably assessed in the area of "oral communication skills." Here the average rating was 4. The new hires got mixed assessments in the area of "safety consciousness." The average rating was 3.2 and the mode 3.

On "ability to assume responsibility" the ratings clustered towards the middle of the scale. In the area of "dependability" employers either chose 3 or 4 to reflect their sentiment. The scores for "adaptability" were generally positive. Only 10.7% of the respondents gave the employees being scrutinized a rating of less than 3 and no one gave them a rating of 1. Over half of the respondents thought those hired right out of a high school vocational program rated a 3 on "problem solving ability." The ratings were higher in the area of "motiviation." Almost 40% of those interviewed gave new high school hires a 4 or "good" rating.

The "overall" rating was a positive 3.4. Thirty-five percent awarded a 4 on this item.

Several personnel managers digressed during this part of the interview. Many expressed a concern regarding the immaturity of younger workers. They

TABLE 7

GENERAL EVALUATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES RECENTLY EMPLOYED*

Criteria	Very Poor 1		Poor 2		Neutral 3		Good 4		Very Good 5		No Opinion/ NA		Mean	Mode
	N	H%	N	H%	N	H%	N	H%	N	H%	N	H%		
Technical knowledge	0	0.0	3	10.7	7	25.0	12	42.9	0	0.0	6	21.4	3.4	"4"
Work attitude	1	3.6	6	21.4	6	21.4	9	32.1	1	3.6	5	17.9	3.1	"4"
Work quality	0	0.0	0	0.0	13	46.4	10	35.7	0	0.0	5	17.9	3.4	"3"
Written communication skills	2	7.1	9	32.1	8	28.6	1	3.6	0	0.0	8	28.6	2.4	"2"
Oral communication skills	0	0.0	4	14.3	9	32.1	10	35.7	0	0.0	5	17.9	3.2	"4"
Safety Consciousness	0	0.0	6	21.4	10	35.7	6	21.4	0	0.0	6	21.4	3.2	"3"
Ability to assume responsibility	0	0.0	4	14.3	10	35.7	7	25.0	0	0.0	7	25.0	3.1	"3"
Dependability	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	35.7	12	42.9	0	0.0	6	21.4	3.5	"4"
Adaptability	0	0.0	3	10.7	10	35.7	10	35.7	0	0.0	5	17.9	3.3	"3" "4"
Problem solving ability	0	0.0	2	7.1	15	53.6	3	10.7	0	0.0	8	28.6	3.0	"3"
Motivation	2	7.1	1	3.6	8	28.5	11	39.3	1	3.6	5	17.9	3.4	"4"
Overall Rating	0	0.0	0	0.0	13	46.4	10	35.7	0	0.0	5	17.9	3.4	"3"

*Percentages are adjusted to delete "no opinion" and "non-applicable" responses.

were quick to acknowledge, however, that age and social development were two things over which secondary schools have little influence and less control. The age for school entering and leaving is stipulated, and the family and peer group probably play a significantly greater role in the socialization process than does the school.

Almost 93% of the employers reported having employees who had taken vocational education courses at a community college (refer to Table 8). Nearly 40% said the skill area in which they were most likely to hire was "business" (refer to Table 9). More than one out of five reported that the skill area in which they were most likely to hire was "mechanical." One in ten listed "construction." The employer was then asked to focus his attention on the performance of persons hired in the skill area reported as being most heavily represented in his firm's work force, for the remainder of the "community college hire" questions.

Over two-thirds of the employers reported that the community colleges were doing a "good job" in preparing graduates for work and another 17.9% thought their effort was at least "fair" (refer to Table 10).

The critical question for the community colleges, as for the secondary schools, involved a comparison of the preparation of former students who had experienced training in a vocational area as opposed to those who had not. Over 82% of the employers stated that vocational education students were "better prepared" (refer to Table 11). This pattern of response proved to be even more favorable than that observed last year when about three-fourths of the employers responded in a like manner. No respondent expressed the view that vocational education students were "less prepared." The same attributes or characteristics used to evaluate the job performance of persons hired directly out of high school were also applied against the new employees having a community college background in vocational education. The scale was 1 to 5, with 5 representing the most positive rating. Former community college students with a vocational education background did very well.

TABLE 8

EMPLOYEES WITH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION BACKGROUNDS

Response	N	%
Yes	26	92.9
No	2	7.1
Don't Know/Non-Applicable	0	0.0
TOTAL	28	100.0

TABLE 9

SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS TAKEN BY

COMMUNITY COLLEGE GRADUATES

Program	N	%
Agriculture	0	0.0
Business	11	39.3
Construction	3	10.7
Electrical/Electronic	1	3.6
Food Service	2	7.1
Health	1	3.6
Technical Graphic	0	0.0
Mechanical	6	21.4
Personal/Public Service	1	3.6
Non-Applicable	3	10.7
Other	0	0.0
TOTAL	28	100.0

TABLE 10

ADEQUACY OF EMPLOYMENT PREPARATION

OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE GRADUATES

Assessment	N	%
A good job	19	67.8
A fair job	5	17.9
A poor job	3	10.7
Non-Applicable	0	0.0
No opinion	1	3.6
	28	100.0

TABLE 11

COMPARISON OF NEW EMPLOYEES WITH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

BACKGROUND IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE WITH THOSE WITHOUT

	N	%
No basis for comparison	0	0.0
Voc. ed. students better prepared	23	82.2
Voc. ed. students no better prepared	3	10.7
Voc. ed. students less prepared	0	0.0
Non-Applicable	0	0.0
No opinion	2	7.1
TOTAL	28	100.0

On "technical knowledge" the average rating was a high 3.8, and over 67% of the respondents awarded a 4 or a "good" rating (refer to Table 12). In the area of "work attitude" the average rating was 3.9 and the mode was also 4. The mean rating on "work quality" was a commendable 3.7, with more than half selecting the 4 or "good" rating.

As had been the case with the secondary school products, those attending a community college did least well in "written communication skills." The average rating was 3.3 which is, when taken by itself, fairly positive. However, this was the only criterion where the mode was 3. On the other criteria the mode was 4.

Oral communication skills produced a rating of 3.7 and "safety consciousness" also generated an average of 3.7. Fifty-seven percent of the personnel managers awarded a 4 rating to the community college people on their "ability to assume responsibility." The average rating was 3.7.

Almost two out of three of the personnel directors gave vocationally trained community college products a 4 or "good" rating on their "adaptability." The assessment on "problem solving ability" was somewhat lower. However, many employers confided the fact that they did not expect most new hires to do a lot of problem solving.

Those from the community colleges got high marks on "motivation." The 3.8 average rating is consistent with the equally positive scores on "work attitude." Such congruence gives us additional confidence in the reliability of the instrument used.

The "overall" rating given to community college products, that had experienced occupational training while in college, was 3.9 with nearly 80% of the respondents awarding a 4 or "good" rating.

TABLE 12

GENERAL EVALUATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

COMMUNITY COLLEGE GRADUATES RECENTLY EMPLOYED*

Criteria	Very Poor 1 N	H%	Poor 2 N	H%	Neutral 3 N	H%	Good 4 N	H%	Very Good 5 N	H%	No Opinion/ NA N	H%	Mean	Mode
Technical knowledge	0	0.0	1	3.6	4	14.3	19	67.9	2	7.1	2	7.1	3.8	"4"
Work attitude	0	0.0	1	3.6	5	17.9	15	53.5	5	17.9	2	7.1	3.9	"4"
Work quality	0	0.0	1	3.6	6	21.4	18	64.3	1	3.6	2	7.1	3.7	"4"
Written communication skills	0	0.0	2	7.1	11	39.3	8	28.6	1	3.6	6	21.4	3.3	"3"
Oral communication skills	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	32.1	14	50.0	3	10.7	2	7.1	3.7	"4"
Safety consciousness	1	3.6	2	7.1	8	28.6	15	53.6	0	0.0	2	7.1	3.7	"4"
Ability to assume responsibility	0	0.0	1	3.6	7	25.0	16	57.1	1	3.6	3	10.7	3.7	"4"
Dependability	0	0.0	2	7.1	3	10.7	20	71.6	1	3.6	2	7.1	3.7	"4"
Adaptability	0	0.0	1	3.6	6	21.4	18	64.3	1	3.6	2	7.1	3.7	"4"
Problem solving ability	0	0.0	1	3.6	10	35.7	14	50.0	1	3.6	2	7.1	3.6	"4"
Motivation	0	0.0	2	7.1	2	7.1	20	71.6	2	7.1	2	7.1	3.8	"4"
Overall rating	0	0.0	1	3.6	2	7.1	22	78.6	1	3.6	2	7.1	3.9	"4"

*Percentages are adjusted to delete "no opinion" and "non-applicable" responses.

In order to gain additional evidence regarding employers' satisfaction with vocational education, the participants were also asked to respond to the question, "Do vocational education students make better employees than those without vocational education?" Almost 85% responded in the affirmative (refer to Table 13). This provides further corroboration for the findings reported in Tables 6 and 8 where the focus was directed at comparative preparation. It is also consistent with the findings reported in Table 14 of last years large business survey and those of the small business canvass reported in Tables 28 and 38. This study, then, replicates the earlier findings and provides additional documentation regarding employers' satisfaction with existing secondary and postsecondary programs of vocational education and occupational training.

TABLE 13

DO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION STUDENTS
MAKE BETTER EMPLOYEES THAN THOSE
WITHOUT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Response	N	%
Yes	24	85.8
No	2	7.1
No Opinion	2	7.1
TOTAL	28	100.0

CHART 1

COMMENTS VOLUNTEERED ABOUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION HIRES

* vocational education programs in Hawaii don't do enough to sell themselves..,those in California are more aggressive

* vocational education graduates need to be taught how to complete application forms

* those applicants with some vocational education background tend to require less training and have a greater sense of purpose

* students need to have training in their senior year on how to fil' out an application and get a job,..the instruction on how to complete a resume conducted by some schools during the freshman year is forgotten by the time they graduate

* the career guidance program looks promising...when fully developed it will meet a real need

* math and verbal skills should be stressed,..particularly among those who plan to seek employment on graduation

* the schools today seem to be producing graduates with greater self-confidence and poise

* the DECA program gives students skills in working with people...this is important in retailing.

* graduates need better math skills..,about 70% fail the basic math test we give them

* schools need to instill a sense of responsibility and tenacity...many new hires quit the first time they encounter difficulty or a problem

* there are no real weaknesses in the public school program...on the whole they're doing a good job

* the schools need to place greater emphasis on basic written and oral language skills

* schools need to work on improving written and oral communication skills

* applicants don't know how to read directions or fill out the necessary forms

CHART 1
(continued)

* more career planning needs to be done in the high schools

* more practical training in occupational skills need to be undertaken

* applicants trained in vocational education are, for one, more responsible and dependable as a group

* schools should emphasize vocational education...many people don't realize that some of our mechanics make more money than a lot of professional people

* the DOE needs to teach more self-discipline...a lot of high school graduates feel the world owes them a living

* the math skills of public school graduates seem to be improving

* the schools need to teach students how to apply for jobs

* in general the schools are doing a good job...they need to stress vocational education more

* the people we have dealt with in the public schools have been very helpful

* the selection process for specialized programs should be improved

* the schools are doing a good job in business skills training...however, the communication skills of graduates leave a lot to be desired

* the public schools are doing a pretty good job...they need to emphasize commercial courses more

* emphasis on standard English would be helpful

* schools need to increase work motivation...the attitude toward work in general is poor...maybe this is not the primary function of schools, but they should try to correct a lamentable situation

* the people we've hired in the clerical areas have been very satisfactory...the standards are too low in the mechanical areas...schools need to up-grade competency levels

* graduates of mechanical programs can't measure...don't have adequate vocabularies

* teachers today no longer have the dedication they once had...the DOE needs to have a better plan for evaluating teachers

CHART 1
(continued)

* the new emphasis on guidance and career planning is good

* students have trouble completing applications

* students need training in how to seek a job,..they need to know what kind of behavior is expected in the work place

* the DOE faculty and staff are devoted...they're dealing with some difficult problems and coping well under the circumstances

CHART 2

COMMENTS VOLUNTEERED ABOUT COMMUNITY COLLEGE HIRES

* former students lack application skills
* technical skills of Hawaii community college graduates are generally better than those of graduates of community colleges on the West Coast
* the graduates we have hired have been very technically competent
* colleges should emphasize communication skills more
* colleges need to offer more evening courses in vocational education
* graduates frequently don't show they have the skills to complete an application expediently
* the colleges are doing a good job in the merchandising area
* the apprenticeship programs are good...they need to be given greater emphasis
* preparation of graduates is particularly good in areas such as computer science
* we would like to see Honolulu Community College open up the marine pipe fitter and marine machinist programs to our company...at present only Pearl Harbor benefits
* the practical skill aspect of the training is good...the colleges have good facilities for skills training
* the community colleges are teaching good basic office skills
* if the colleges could somehow improve the work attitude of students, this would help...however, maybe that's a function of other institutions in society
* applicants have trouble filling out the forms
* placement officers need to be more aggressive
* community colleges should place more emphasis on teaching techniques necessary for good interpersonal relations...the ability to get along with people is critical
* community college programs are realistic and produce graduates that are pragmatic

CHART 2
(continued)

* the colleges are affordable and provide relevant course work
* the colleges are inflexible with regards to the full-time admissions requirement...they're not meeting our in-service needs
* instructors need to motivate apprentices to finish their programs expediently
* graduates have unrealistic expectations
* students don't know how to seek work...their interview skills are weak
* the colleges are producing dependable people...they are effective in the jobs for which they were hired
* the community colleges are doing a good job
* the Honolulu Community College welding program should place more emphasis on safety
* the community colleges produce graduates that have a realistic view of work
* recent hires have been very good...our newest vocational nurses show improved communication skills and are more effective at interpersonal relations
* new hires do tend to get rattled
* the system is a good one...many people are benefiting from postsecondary education who would not otherwise
* community college people are generally preparing for work, and that makes a difference
* more discipline in the schools is necessary
* need to teach more communication skills...both oral and written...standard English is a must in our business
* need to raise standards...the community colleges don't have enough evening classes...they are not meeting our in-service training needs...our people can't attend full-time during the day and hold their jobs
* grades must be inflated...new employees simply don't perform at the level that their grades indicate that they should
* more technical training should be included in the program...the airplane mechanics trained by HCC make excellent general mechanics...they have the generic skills to do most jobs.

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